FOR CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

by CHARLES M. SHELDON

Author of "IN HIS STEPS"

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Author of "In His Steps," "One of the Two," etc., etc.

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FOR CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

PROLOGUE

The minister had just come home from his prayer meeting, and he was very much discouraged.

He had gone at once up to his study and was sitting down at his desk looking hopelessly at his Sunday morning sermon, which was half written.

"I can never finish it. I have not the heart to go on with it," said the minister, speaking out loud, a habit he had acquired while in college and seminary.

"Of course not," said a voice so near by that the minister was very much startled. But the minute he heard the voice he knew it was the Devil's. No one would ever mistake such a voice; and the minister as he wheeled about in his chair and saw his visitor sitting on the edge of the table where the religious papers were kept, recognized his old enemy, and his heart sank lower than ever as he noted the triumphant sneer on the Devil's face.

"Of course not," he repeated, "especially when you know that more than half your entire church membership are liars."

"What!" cried the minister, indignantly.

"Your church is full of liars," repeated the Devil

calmly. "Let us see. You have a membership of three hundred?"

"Three hundred and fifteen," corrected the minister.

"Three hundred and fifteen. One hundred of them are men. Seventy-five of them business men. All of them, when they joined the church, solemnly vowed to support the church services and to love the church more than the world. Isn't that so?"

"It is," replied the minister anxiously.

"Now, then," continued the Devil triumphantly, "how many of these men ever go to the church prayer meeting?"

"How many?" faltered the minister.

"Yes, how many?"

The minister made a rapid calculation, as his memory called up the appearance of his church chapel room on prayer meeting nights.

"About twelve."

"What!" cried the Devil incredulously. "Are you sure?"

"Maybe it is a little larger number than usual," the minister stammered.

"Well, never mind. Call it twelve of your seventy-five business men attend the prayer meeting regularly. The rest never come; or at least very seldom. How many of the women go to the prayer meeting?"

"About forty or fifty," said the minister, brightening up a little.

"Forty or fifty out of two hundred. Say a possible sixty-five attend prayer meeting out of a total

membership of three hundred and fifteen. And yet all of them vowed solemnly to support the church in all its services. Minister, I said your church was full of liars. Isn't it so?"

"A good many of the members are so situated that they can't get out in the evening," groaned the minister.

"Did you ever know of any of them to stay away regularly from an entertainment or party if they were invited out on prayer meeting night?" the Devil questioned remorselessly.

The minister was silent.

"Did you ever know of any of your business men refusing to attend a political convention or a business convention because they hadn't time to go?"

Still the minister was silent. He had grown very pale and sad.

"I made a canvass a while ago of your church and I found that more than half your members, preacher, spent an average of two nights a week all the year around in going to parties, receptions or entertainments. When prayer meeting night came, they said they were too tired, or something, to go. But if they could go to an entertainment don't you think they could go to prayer meeting if they wanted to?"

The minister made a gesture towards the Devil almost as if he appealed to him to leave the study, but the Devil put his foot farther across his knee as if he intended to be more comfortable. In doing so he knocked the minister's favorite religious weekly upon the floor.

"Did you ever have half your church membership out to prayer meeting at one time?" asked the Devil ironically.

The minister smiled faintly. It was too absurd an idea to entertain for a moment.

"How large an Endeavor Society do you have?" asked the visitor, with a smile.

"About a hundred members in all. Eighty-five active members." The minister looked apprehensively at the Devil as he wondered what the question meant.

"Let's see. Your young people have a pledge or something that they take when they join, don't they?"

"Yes. What have you got against that?" demanded the minister, half rising from his seat and speaking as fiercely as a minister ever has the right to speak.

"Nothing; oh, nothing," chuckled the Devil. "But isn't there something in the pledge about the Endeavor members going to the church prayer meeting? Isn't the motto of the Endeavor Society 'For Christ and the Church'? And doesn't the pledge say: 'I promise that I will make it the rule of my life to support my own church in every way, especially by attending all her Sunday and mid-week services' ?"

The Devil paused, and the minister added: "You have not finished the sentence in the pledge—'Unless prevented by some reason which I can conscientiously give to my Savior.' "

"Exactly. I forgot that part of it. But now, preacher, how many of your young people attend the church prayer meeting regularly?"

"I don't know just how many," replied the minister doggedly.

"Oh, yes, you do. Don't join the noble army of liars in your church. You know about how many of the young people attend."

"Forty or fifty, maybe," said the minister, but his voice sounded rather faint.

"Isn't that a high average?"

"Maybe it is," replied the minister slowly.

"Isn't it true that not more than twenty-five or thirty of your eighty-five Endeavorers regularly attend the church prayer meeting? Don't try to get out of it, preacher. I've been to a good many of your meetings and enjoyed them. They are so dull and stupid, and it does me so much good to look around and see the empty seats and know that most of your people are somewhere else. But about your young people. Aren't they liars, too? How much does their motto amount to? How much is their pledge good for?"

"Some of them have good reasons for not attending;" the minister roused up a little.

"Reasons they could 'conscientiously give to their Savior' ?" asked the Devil sarcastically, as he hitched himself farther over the edge of the table, knocking another religious paper on the floor.

The minister was silent. He was growing faint at heart as he reviewed the situation.

"Now, there was an average of one entertainment a week last year," continued the Devil contemptuously, "which I noticed more than thirty of your Christian

Endeavorers attended, even when it rained and stormed. I never saw one of these thirty Endeavorers at your church prayer meeting. Do you think, preacher, that going to these parties was a good reason to be given to the Savior? Don't you think your young people could keep this pledge if they wanted to? Don't you think they are really liars?"

The minister groaned and laid his head on his desk. He even put his hands over his ears so as to keep out the sound of his visitor's voice, but the voice penetrated his very heart as the Devil went on:

"Preacher, your influence is far less than mine. I can get three-fourths of your church members to break their vows and attend the pleasures of the world instead of your church prayer meeting. I can persuade nearly one-half of your Endeavorers that they do not need to attend the church prayer meeting, even if they did promise in their pledge to do so. Don't you think the church is a failure? Don't you think the motto of the Endeavor Society, 'For Christ and the Church,' is a mockery? Don't you think your whole church is full of liars? Don't you think you had better resign and let me run the whole thing, seeing I have nearly all of it now? Don't you think organized Christianity is a failure after all?"

The minister put his head down lower yet, and in doing so he slid out of his chair upon his knees. His head was resting on his open Bible, and his hands were clasped in the attitude of prayer.

The Devil moved uneasily, and after a long

continued silence on the part of the minister, he rose from his seat on the table, sweeping off nearly all the rest of the papers, and went over close by the preacher and tried to pull the Bible out from under his head. But the minister moved his hands until they clung to the Book, and he still remained firmly on his knees. Then the Devil looked around hesitatingly, and finally went away.

The minister continued to kneel in the same position. When the sun rose next morning, he was still kneeling there.

CHAPTER I

"Oh, dear!" said Miss Brooks, the soprano. "I'm so tired this morning that I had half a mind not to come to church at all."

"You don't look tired," remarked the tenor, as he distributed copies of the anthem to the chorus.

Miss Gertrude Brooks did not answer the tenor. Her face had a little more color in it as she took the music and hummed over her part. The tenor's slight remark conveyed more than the spoken words. He said very plainly that the face of the soprano was so beautiful to him that it never looked tired. He did not say all this out loud. But Miss Brooks understood what he meant.

The chorus consisted of a dozen young people, together with a quartet of somewhat older young people. It was a few moments before the time for the morning service, and the members of the chorus were gathered in the little room at the side of the organ where they met before going out upon the pulpit platform to take their places for the service.

The tenor finished distributing the music and came and sat down beside the soprano. The members of the chorus were chatting together in a subdued manner so as not to be heard by the congregation, which was now rapidly filling the church.

"This is a beautiful anthem we sing this morning," said the tenor somewhat shyly.

"Yes," answered the soprano, turning over the leaves of the music and humming softly her part:

" 'I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.' "

Then she looked up and said: "I'm afraid my voice is not quite equal to that 'a' this morning."

"How was the party last night? I had to go out of town on business for the firm yesterday, and didn't get back until after midnight. In fact, I came in this morning on No. 7."

"Oh, it was splendid. So sorry you missed it, Mr. Locke. It was one of the best private entertainments of the season."

"I don't care about that. I didn't miss that," replied the tenor; and again the soprano colored and looked down at the music.

"We had charades and shadow pantomimes and then the new game called 'Success.' Not just like cards, you know. Belle Lewis won the first prize."

"I know who won the second," said the tenor, pointing at a silver pin which the soprano was wearing.

"Yes," replied Miss Brooks, laughing softly. "It's very pretty, don't you think?"

"Very," said the tenor expressively.

But just then the organist began his prelude, and that was always the signal at the Morgan Street church for the choir to come out upon the platform.

The service at the Morgan Street church always began promptly, and a feature of it was the singing of an anthem by the choir immediately after the prelude on the organ.

When the choir came out and took its place, the minister had not yet come out of his little room on the other side of the organ. When the prelude was about half finished he opened the door and walked slowly to his chair. When he sat down, he did what the choir had never seen him do before. He leaned over and put his face between his hands.

Every one in the choir noticed this unusual movement on the minister's part. There was a moment of hesitation on the part of the choir as the minister remained in the same position after the organist had ceased playing. The soprano looked up at the organist as he shifted the prelude music over on the rack and put the morning anthem in its place. The organist turned about a little on his seat and his eyes followed the soprano's glance as it went back to the minister.

He looked surprised and even perplexed, but the next moment he turned and began playing. The choir rose, and the soprano's voice after the first few notes of the organ went out clear and distinct: "'I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.'"

The tenor took it up: "'My feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem . . . . I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.'"

Then the chorus rose in the refrain, "'I was glad,'" and the anthem swept over the church in a strong, sweet harmony, closing with the solo again and an "Amen" from quartet and chorus together.

Still the minister remained seated with his head bowed and his face between his hands. The pulpit hid him from the congregation in the main body of the house, but the people sitting in the pews farthest down on the side could see him, and there was evident wonderment at the sight. For not even the members of the Morgan Street church who were most familiar with the minister's pulpit habits could remember seeing him do such a thing before.

The choir sat down and the organist continued playing softly. When he ceased, there was an awkward silence, for the minister did not move. Every member of the choir was now looking intently at him. Was he ill? The soprano was becoming very nervous. The tenor rose from his place, which was nearest the pulpit, and was about to step down and see if anything was wrong, when the minister suddenly rose and began the usual form of service.

The Rev. Mark Spencer had been pastor of the Morgan Street church for ten years. He was forty-five years old and a man of more than average ability both as preacher and pastor. His people liked him and trusted him. The church had steadily grown from a membership of two hundred to three hundred and fifteen. He was faithful in his duties, had a good fund of common sense and tact, and had won the respect and confidence of the people in his parish and the town.

As he rose this Sunday morning after that pause following the anthem, the most careless members of

the Morgan Street church noticed his face and were struck with its unusual pallor and sadness. Something had certainly happened to the minister, and the people wondered what it could be. They were soon to know from the minister himself.

When he reached the sermon in the order of service the minister turned about, partly facing the choir.

"I have chosen for my text this morning," he said with a significant look, "the same words as those in the anthem: 'I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.' "

The choir looked in astonishment at him. There had never been a movement on the part of the Rev. Mark Spencer so abrupt and informal as this since he had been pastor of the church.

"I want to tell the choir and the congregation," he continued with a slow and almost painful emphasis, "why I chose these words for my text this morning. I have had a personal interview with the Devil this past week and he suggested the text to me."

If the people of Morgan Street church had ever entertained a suspicion of the Rev. Mark Spencer's sanity they might have been prepared for the shock which his blunt statement caused. As they had always considered him to be exceptionally well-balanced they were astonished beyond measure at his words this morning, but as he went on the sensation deepened. They began to understand at last what he meant.

"How true do you think it is that we are glad when we hear the invitation, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord'? You have heard me invite you a great

many times to come to the prayer meeting. How glad are you when you hear it? Is it true, as the Devil said to me, that some of my church members and Endeavorers are liars?"

Here the minister related in a graphic way his conversation with his visitor the evening after the prayer meeting. All over the church, people stared intently at the pale, strained face in the pulpit, not believing their senses. Was this a sermon they were listening to? Was the minister in his right mind?

Gertrude Brooks in the choir listened to the minister's account of his interview with increasing color in her face. When he quoted the Devil's remarks about the large number of Endeavorers who went to entertainments but were never seen in the church prayer meeting, she lowered her head. When he went on to relate what the Devil said about that part of the pledge relating to the church week-day service, the soprano's fair face grew more and more troubled and her head sunk lower still. But when he went on to give almost exactly the sneer of the Devil at the motto, "For Christ and the Church," the soprano no longer looked up even at intervals, but kept her eyes fastened on the music in her lap, while her fingers nervously moved together as if she had been stricken with some sudden and uncontrollable emotion.

But if the soprano was deeply stirred by the minister's remarkable sermon, the Morgan Street congregation was certainly profoundly excited. There had never been a time in its history when the

church had been so surprised, so shocked, so unexpectedly smitten with sensation at a preaching service. The business men, who had usually sat complacently listening to Mr. Spencer's well turned sentences, grew red in the face as he related what the Devil said about the liars in the church. The president of the Endeavor Society, who was a bookkeeper in a bank, held his breath as the minister told about the attitude of the Devil as he sat on the minister's table and carelessly kicked his religious papers off upon the floor while he said: "I am persuaded that more than one-third of your Endeavorers think they do not need to attend the church prayer meeting, even if they did promise in their pledge to do so. Don't you think the motto of the Endeavor Society, 'For Christ and the Church,' is a mockery?"

"'I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord,'" continued the minister. And it was not in a tone of irony or sarcasm that he spoke, but with an expression of great sadness, that he went on: "Is it true that the joy of our Christian life has its source in the service of God's house, or is it true that the pleasures of the world give us more gladness? Are we truly glad when some one says, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord on prayer meeting night,' or are we glad only when some one says 'Let us go to this party or reception or entertainment'? Do you think the Devil was right about it when he said that a good many of our church members are liars? Do you think it is true that the Endeavor motto, 'For Christ and the Church,' is a mockery

because some of the members of the society are breaking the pledge in which they promised to sustain the mid-week service of the church? 'I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.' If that was the feeling on the part of the church don't you think we would have more than twelve out of seventy-five business men present at the prayer meeting? If it was true, don't you think that more than thirty or forty out of eighty-five members of the Christian Endeavor Society would be present?"

This is only a brief extract from the minister's sermon. It was one of the longest sermons that the Morgan Street church had ever heard. It is also a fact that never before had a sermon roused so much attention. No one went to sleep. No one was tired or restless. No one in the choir attempted to eat peppermints, or (as had sometimes been known) attempted to carry on a subdued whispering conversation. The eyes and minds of the whole congregation were almost painfully fastened upon Rev. Mark Spencer's face, and the effect of the sermon deepened with every word he said.

When the minister closed the service with the usual hymn, prayer and benediction, the people were surprised to see him walk back to his little room by the side of the organ instead of coming down the pulpit platform steps to greet the people.

In the somewhat intense, awkward silence which followed the shutting of the minister's study door, the Morgan Street church realized that a crisis had come for their pastor. As the silence began to be

broken by the moving of the congregation, the soprano rose, and without replying to a remark made by the tenor, she walked slowly out of the church. When she reached her home she went at once to her own room.

CHAPTER II

Miss Gertrude Brooks sat down in her room and thoughtfully reviewed that part of the minister's sermon which had specially touched her; for it was true that she was deeply moved by the minister's account of what the Devil had said about the Endeavor Society members going to entertainments instead of to the prayer meeting.

She was sitting in front of the looking glass, and after a moment, although she had not been looking at her own face because she was so truly absorbed in her thought of the sermon, she rose and went up near the glass and stood there for a few seconds.

"It was the truth," she said out loud softly. She then slowly took the little silver pin that the tenor had noticed, out of the lapel of her coat, and after hesitating a moment, she stuck it into a crack between the glass and its frame.

As she did so, she noticed another pin on the other side of the frame, thrust so far down that only the head of it was visible.

With a deepening color the soprano pulled the pin out from its place where it had evidently been for a long time, and after another moment of hesitation she stuck it into her dress.

"I haven't worn my Endeavor pin for nearly a year," she said to herself in the looking glass. Her face was still very thoughtful. When, an hour later,

her mother called her to come down to dinner, Miss Gertrude Brooks stopped in front of the mirror again before she opened her door, and wiped away traces of tears. She was, if truth be told, profoundly surprised at her own emotion. It was a long time since she had actually been so touched by a sermon. She wondered a little if it meant the beginning of new things to her.

She would have been even more surprised, perhaps, if she could have seen the effect of the minister's sermon on other members of the congregation.

"That's an ugly word for a preacher to use," said Mr. Bruce Carter, president of the Morgan County Bank, as he walked home from service that morning.

"What word?" asked his wife, a very plainly dressed woman, with a kindly look habitual to a very plain face.

"'Liars.' Mr. Spencer the same as said that most of the business men in the church were liars. I say it's an ugly word, and I, for one, don't care to stand that sort of preaching."

His wife was silent. She was thinking of the number of times she had been to the prayer meeting without her husband when he had been busy entertaining friends or attending to the business of the bank down town.

"Well, don't you think so, Mary?" asked President Carter irritably.

"Mr. Spencer did not call the members liars. He said that was what the Devil called them."

"Oh, well! That's what he meant. I tell you,

Mary, the prayer meeting—we business men can't take time to—it's sheer waste of time to go. It isn't required. Mr. Spencer does not understand how business men are situated, and all that."

Before Mrs. Carter could reply, Judge Morton, who was just behind them with his wife, called out:

"I say, Carter, that was a great sermon, wasn't it! Hit you pretty hard, didn't it?" and Judge Morton laughed rather boisterously.

"Hit some other people, I guess," replied Carter, somewhat stiffly. He was too much stirred up by the morning's service to take Judge Morton's remark kindly.

"Oh, I'm willing to count myself in with all the others. A new departure for Mr. Spencer, though, don't you think? He never issued such a general indictment of church members before. How do you think they will take it?"

Mr. Carter did not reply, but Mrs. Carter timidly said:

"I hope the members will do what Mr. Spencer so much desires, and attend the prayer meeting."

"That's what I say, too," added Mrs. Morton indignantly. "The idea of the business men saying they can't go to the church prayer meeting! Why, they go to everything else if it happens to come on that night. I tell you, Mrs. Carter, it's true as Mr. Spencer says. The business men don't want to go into the house of the Lord. If they did they would find a way to go, just as they go to their lodges and politics."

"Mrs. Morton is firing a broadside at me," said Judge Morton good-naturedly.

"You know well enough, John, that every word Mr. Spencer said is true!" continued Mrs. Morton warmly. "It is a shame that the men in this church don't support their pastor in the church prayer meeting. The first thing they know they'll lose one of the best ministers a church ever had. It's enough to discourage a saint and make a minister willing to go out of the ministry, even into such a profession as the law!"

"We're getting our second sermon pretty early in the day," remarked Judge Morton. "It's all true, though," he added, with the first serious word he had spoken. "I was sorry to see Mr. Spencer so wrought up. He showed it by going back into his room."

"Why don't you men do the one thing, then, that will encourage him? Attend the prayer meeting and make it interesting and helpful. You could do it if you wanted to."

"I'm afraid that's it," said Judge Morton quietly. "We don't want to go to the trouble." And at that point Mr. and Mrs. Carter left them, going down another street.

Scores of men and women in the Morgan Street church had similar conversations as they walked home from service that day. A good many men like Bruce Carter were angry. The sermon had been too personal for them. A good many others acknowledged the truth of the minister's position as Judge Morton did, but the result of the sermon was not a determina-

tion to do anything more than they had been doing. When a business man in a church has not been in the habit of attending a prayer meeting for years, when he considers it a bore, and a stupid, dull place without any entertainment for him, it takes something more than a sermon, even so unusual a sermon as that one, to change his habits and bring him into a cheerful, loyal attendance on a service he has neglected so long.

But there was at least one other person besides the soprano in the church that morning who took the sermon deeply to heart; and that was the president of the Christian Endeavor Society.

Andrew Stewart had been president of the society only one month. He was a conscientious, hard-working young man, a book-keeper in the Morgan County Bank, and he supported an invalid mother and two sisters on a comparatively small salary. He had reluctantly accepted the position of president of the Endeavor Society, but had served faithfully so far and was not afraid of any amount of hard work.

He went home from that remarkable account of the interview between his pastor and the Devil, more disturbed than he had ever been in all his Christian experience. Throughout the whole of the afternoon he felt the uneasiness of his mind growing. He asked himself how much influence he had over the members of the society. Could he in any way make the members of the society see the duty they had been neglecting? His face burned even as the soprano's had, at the thought of his own pledge broken

repeatedly without any excuse he could conscientiously give to his Savior. He had not attended a church prayer meeting for a year. To be sure, he had not been one of those who spent much time in going to entertainments. His native Scotch prudence and a great love of quiet reading kept him at home almost every evening. He read aloud a great deal to his mother. But even that was not an excuse to be conscientiously given to the Master, for his mother would be glad to have him attend the prayer meeting. In fact, if she had thought of how the pledge was being broken by the members of the society of which her son was president, she would probably have been as much disturbed by it as the minister himself.

As the day came to its close and the hour of the Endeavor meeting drew near, Andrew Stewart grew more and more convinced that he had a duty to perform towards the society as its president. He was naturally a timid, retiring young man, with a great shrinking from public notice. The thought that he ought to do something to rouse the society to a sense of its sacred promise to the church made him tremble. But when it was time for him to go to the service he put on his hat and started to go out of the house, determined to do something, no matter how much it might cost.

"Good-bye, mother," he said, and as his custom had been since his childhood, he kissed the pale face reclining on the pillow of the easy chair. He had been reading aloud as usual that Sunday afternoon

and his mother had been sitting up in her chair for an hour.

"There is somewhat troubling you, laddie," spoke the mother, using the old term she had given him when a boy.

"Yes, mother," replied Andrew, hesitating. It lacked fifteen minutes of the time for the service and he could walk to the church in five minutes. So he took a seat again by the mother and briefly told her what the conflict in his mind was. He had already given her a brief account of the morning sermon, but they had not discussed it owing to Mrs. Stewart's great weakness.

"Do your duty, laddie," said the invalid, passing her thin hand across his cheek.

"I will, mother," replied Andrew simply. And he kissed his mother again. When he had gone out, his mother shut her eyes and her lips moved in a silent prayer that her son might have courage given him to witness for the truth.

There was an unusually large attendance at the Morgan Street church Endeavor Society that evening. Gertrude Brooks, the soprano, was one of the older members who had been elected by the society as musical director. She had been very faithful to her duties and enjoyed the work. To-night her face still bore the marks of the impression made upon her by the morning service. She was a girl of a very sunny, happy temperament, fond of social life and a favorite at all the entertainments given by the young people. To-night she showed an unusual seriousness that did

not escape notice. Andrew Stewart, especially, looked attentively at her several times during the course of the meeting.

It was the custom at the Morgan Street church society for the president to make announcements of any meetings or business just before the last song and offering. When Andrew Stewart rose this evening he looked thoughtfully around over the room and said slowly:

"The president would like to meet the officers of the society and all the chairmen of committees in the west parlor of the church immediately after the close of the meeting."

When the benediction had been pronounced, Gertrude Brooks came to Andrew Stewart.

"Am I an officer of the society?" she asked with a slight laugh.

There had been some discussion at a previous business meeting regarding the office of musical director, and the soprano alluded to that.

"Yes, certainly, I think so," replied Andrew, with some surprise, for Miss Brooks had not shown any particular interest in the society, except for her own leadership as director.

"I would like to come to the meeting you called because I believe I know what you are going to bring up and I want to help," she said, looking directly at Andrew.

Again he was quite surprised. "I want to talk over the matter of our pledge to sustain the mid-week prayer service of the church," he said gravely.

"I knew that was it. We ought to do something, don't you think?"

"Yes," said Andrew simply. The other officers and members of committees were going into the west parlor.

"I believe our society can keep that pledge, don't you?" Miss Brooks asked, as she walked along by the side of Andrew.

"I do, most certainly," he said, as they entered the room together.

Outside the church, the tenor, who was not a member of the society, but frequently attended, had just come into the vestibule. He had often of late gone home with the soprano from the Endeavor meeting. The soprano did not sing in the second preaching service. She had always given as an excuse her duties as director of the music in the Endeavor Society. The tenor did not sing at the evening service either. He did not give any excuse, but people were beginning to say it was because the soprano did not sing.

People are very often right about such things.

The tenor waited some time and finally he went into the society room and inquired of some of the young people chatting there if Miss Brooks had been at the meeting. They told him where she was.

It lacked twenty minutes of the time for the beginning of the second service in the church room. The tenor took a seat where he could command a view of the west parlor door and waited.

He waited until the service began in the church,

but the door of the parlor leading into the Endeavor room did not open. At last, as the first hymn was being sung, he went over and quietly opened the parlor door and looked in.

The room was empty, but the door leading into the church auditorium was open. He went through the parlor and looked into the church. What was his surprise to see the soprano, with a dozen other members of the society, seated well down in the front of the church!

"Wonder what that means!" he muttered.

The church was far from full. The tenor slipped into a back seat, but he did not stay through the service. As he went home, he was conscious of a feeling of uneasiness which had taken possession of him from that moment when at the close of the morning service he had addressed a remark to the soprano and she had walked down the choir steps without giving him an answer.

CHAPTER III

It was the Monday after the Sunday on which the Rev. Mark Spencer had preached his remarkable sermon about his interview with the Devil, and the soprano was practicing a new piece of music in the parlor at home.

She was so busy with it that she did not hear the bell ring, and did not hear the servant when a caller was announced.

The second time she spoke, the soprano turned and saw the tenor standing in the doorway, smiling.

She rose to meet him, and her face changed color a little at first. The tenor was a frequent visitor at the house lately. Miss Gertrude Brooks had understood for some time why.

They talked about several matters. The tenor was uneasy and did not appear to advantage. Finally he mentioned the new music that the soprano had been practicing.

"It is a piece I found in a recent number of 'The Family Magazine,'" said the soprano, with a noticeable embarrassment, so noticeable that the tenor wondered at it, seeing the occasion had not called for it.

As if to hide some confusion of thought the soprano went to the instrument, sat down by it, and began to sing. The words were a prayer and the music was of a devotional nature.

When she finished, the tenor praised her voice. He had often of late said such things. But this time there was a look of something like displeasure on the soprano's face. The tenor did not see it, because her face was hidden from him as she sat by the piano.

"Oh, by the way," he continued after a moment, during which she had turned again and faced him, "the Berlin Grand Orchestra is to be in town Thursday night. Will you give me the pleasure of your company to it? I have secured two splendid seats."

Miss Gertrude Brooks' face lighted up with enjoyment.

"Yes, indeed! The Berlin Orchestra! Why, we have talked of that for years. But I never supposed we could get them to come. It will be a treat to hear them!"

"You can thank me for that, perhaps," said the tenor a little proudly. "I happen to know the director. I met him once in Berlin. The men's music club authorized me to make arrangements if possible to secure the orchestra for one night when they came out on their western trip."

"How nice!" exclaimed the soprano, as she looked gratefully at the tenor. Miss Gertrude Brooks was passionately fond of orchestra music.

But suddenly her look changed.

"What night did you say the concert was?"

"Thursday."

The soprano nervously twisted some tassels that hung down from the piano cover.

"I'm afraid—I—that is—I don't think I can go that night," she finally said in a low voice.

"Why?" asked the tenor in amazement.

"Because—because—I have another engagement that night."

"Another engagement!"—the tenor was evidently not only very much surprised, but also angry. He did not have enough self-control to hide his feelings.

"Yes," repeated the soprano slowly. "I have another engagement. I have promised to attend the church prayer meeting that night."

"The church prayer meeting! But—you don't mean—"

"I must keep my promise," said the soprano gravely.

"You don't mean that you will miss hearing the orchestra—"

"I shall have to unless I break my promise. I promised Mr. Stewart—"

"Oh! If you promised Mr. Stewart, of course—" began the tenor angrily, and he went on without heeding the warning look in the soprano's eyes. "If you promised Mr. Stewart, of course your promise to me is of no account!"

"I promised Mr. Stewart as president of the Endeavor Society," continued the soprano, finishing her sentence as if she had not been interrupted; "that, with all the other officers of the society and chairmen of committees, I would attend the church prayer meeting hereafter in accordance with my Endeavor pledge. My promise to go to the concert

with you was made before I thought of the evening and the other promise."

She looked steadily at the tenor, and he changed color and for a moment was silent. Then he began to plead with her.

"Just this once, Miss Brooks, Miss Gertrude—think of the opportunity! We won't have such a chance again!"

"A promise is a promise," replied the soprano.

"It hasn't been all this time," said the tenor, with more truth than courtesy. "You've been breaking your Endeavor pledge all along, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have," replied the soprano, her eyes flashing and then dimming with tears, for the tenor's words hurt her deeply; "but is that a good reason for breaking it again?"

"Pardon me," he said, for the first time speaking humbly; "I did not mean to offend you. But I feel very much disappointed. I have been anticipating this concert especially, because—I, because you—might go with me."

"I am very sorry." The soprano spoke with downcast eyes and a flush on her face. The tenor rose and took a step nearer her.

"You are sure your mind is all made up? You could not change and make an exception of one night?"

"No," she answered slowly. And he knew from her manner that the answer was final. His anger came back again. This time he showed it by a sullen silence which lasted several moments.

"You have been converted very suddenly," he said at last. It was almost a sneer the way he said it.

The soprano looked up at him quietly.

"Have you any right to speak to me like that, Mr. Locke?" she asked.

He bit his lip nervously and did not seem to know what to say. At last he took a step towards the hall.

"I think I will be going; I wish you good evening," he said, and his lack of self-control was painfully evident.

"You must excuse me, Mr. Locke, for seeming to be discourteous in refusing your invitation. I would enjoy the concert very much. But I feel as if my endeavor pledge came first."

The tenor muttered something indistinctly that she did not understand as he put on his hat and opened the door.

"Good night," he said abruptly, and went out.

The soprano went back into the parlor and stood for a moment in the center of the room. She put her face in her hands and knew that her cheeks were hot and her lips trembling from the event of the evening.

It was a crisis for her in two ways. She had begun of late to feel towards the tenor as she had never felt towards any other young man of her acquaintance. Her heart had not yet, it is true, been very deeply moved, but she said to herself it might, in a short time,—and now,—this revelation of anger and ungentlemanly feeling on the part of the tenor opened her thought as if to something very serious that she

had suddenly escaped. She drew a long breath as if in thankfulness. But she put her face in her hands again, and when she drew them away there were tears on her cheeks. She might have learned to love him —was that all gone now? She said to herself, something had taken place which made such a possibility out of the question now.

The other crisis had to do with her pledge made to the society. She went over to the piano again and sat down, looking earnestly at the music. She had promised to sing at the church prayer meeting and that was the selection she had chosen. It was because of that fact that she had showed the unusual embarrassment noticed by the tenor. She had never sung anything in the church prayer meeting. The church choir never thought of such a thing. The church choir was only for large audiences on Sunday mornings. It had never dreamed of such a thing as going to the church prayer meeting to make that service interesting and helpful. And yet, why not? The soprano asked the question as she sat there looking at the music and thinking over the whole matter more quietly now that the strain of her recent experience was lessening. Why shouldn't she give her talent for the prayer meeting? She was a member of the church and the Endeavor Society. All the other choir members were also members of the church. Why should they not go in a body every Thursday night and help make that mid-week service a power, a delight to the minister and a blessing to the church?

She grew more thoughtful over the subject every moment. It was true that the other matter with which the tenor had to do did not cause her the trouble that at first it seemed to her it might. In fact she was surprised at herself to feel a glow of enthusiasm, new to her, growing up in her heart at the thought of the possibility for the church if only the members of it and the members of the society kept the solemn covenant they had made.

"'For Christ and the Church,'" she repeated softly. She had kept her promise to keep the pledge in the face of an unusual temptation to enjoy an entertainment. The victory she had gained made her stronger and really happier than she had been for a long time. "'For Christ and the Church,'" she repeated in her heart as she sang over her selection softly. When she finally rose and went up to her room, there was a look of peace on her face which belongs to all those who have overcome the world and been true to their plighted word to God.

CHAPTER IV

It was just a week after his famous interview with the Devil that the minister came up into his study again at the close of his prayer meeting.

It was very late and every one in the parsonage was asleep; but that was not the only reason why the minister mounted the stairs with a light tread. His heart was light and that makes light footsteps.

He shut the door and went up to his study desk and sat down. As he did so he heard a noise, and looking around after he had lighted his study lamp, he saw his visitor of the week before, seated, as before, on the edge of his table where the religious papers were kept.

"Just home from prayer meeting again?" said the Devil cheerfully.

"Yes, just home from prayer meeting again," replied the minister, and his tone was fully as cheerful as his visitor's.

The Devil stared in surprise at the minister and shifted his seat uneasily.

"We had a beautiful meeting," continued the minister without even looking around. He had turned back to his desk after his first glance at the table, and had begun to open his Bible and mark certain passages for his Sunday reading.

"I have been out of town for a week since I was here last," said the Devil slowly, "visiting a church

up in Wrangleville where there has been an interesting scandal, and so I have not kept track of all the details of your parish. But I didn't suppose from the way your prayer meetings have been going lately that you could have such a thing as a 'beautiful meeting.' "

"You don't know everything, do you?" asked the minister, turning over the leaves of his Bible and still sitting calmly with his back to his visitor. It had suddenly come with great power to the minister's heart that the Devil, after all, was not omnipresent any more than he was omnipotent.

"I know a good deal," replied the Devil in a surly tone. He did not like the minister's indifference. It was clear that something had happened in the Morgan Street church while the scandal at Wrangleville was going on.

"Perhaps you would like to know what sort of a meeting we had to-night, seeing you were absent," said the minister, suddenly turning around and facing the figure on the table.

"I shall be glad to hear it," sneered the Devil.

"Oh, no, I don't think you will," replied the minister, smiling. "But in the first place more than half my entire church membership was present."

"First time it ever happened, isn't it?"

"Yes, but not the last, from present indications "

"Was Judge Morton there?" asked the Devil suddenly.

"No," replied the minister gravely.

"Or Bruce Carter, president of the bank?"

"No," again replied the minister, with added sadness.

"I believe they are two of your leading members, aren't they?" said the Devil maliciously.

"No," replied the minister boldly. "They are not leading members if by that you mean men whose influence will lead the church away from Christ. For I believe a movement has been begun which even Judge Morton and Bruce Carter cannot long ignore."

"A movement, eh?"

"A movement by the Endeavor Society. Seventy-five of the eighty-five active members were present at the meeting to-night."

"You don't say!" ejaculated the Devil. He was evidently very much surprised. He looked uneasily at the minister. As the minister looked fearlessly at him, it seemed as if the figure on the table shrank and withered and grew insignificant.

"Was the president of the society there?" The Devil gathered up a little courage and spoke with a confidence he did not feel.

"Yes, Andrew was there and made a splendid talk."

"Made a splendid talk, did he? Miss Brooks, the soprano, there? There was an orchestra entertainment to-night, wasn't there?" asked the Devil in a triumphant tone, feeling quite sure this time of his facts.

"Yes," replied the minister, smiling, "there was an orchestra in town to-night; a very unusual entertainment. But the soprano did not go to it. She was at the prayer meeting and sang a beautiful solo during the service."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Devil in a faint voice.

"The church choir was also present and sang an anthem and helped in the congregational singing also."

The Devil was silent. He was too much overwhelmed by this series of astonishing events to say a word.

"More than that, every officer of the society and every chairman of committees was present and took part in the meeting. More than a dozen of the business men were present also and made remarks. I mean men who have not been out to the prayer meeting for years. Oh, we had a beautiful meeting, as I have said."

"It won't last," growled the Devil hoarsely.

"Oh, I think it will," replied the minister cordially. "The members of the Endeavor Society all came up at the close of the meeting and in the most earnest manner spoke of their determination to keep their pledge and be true to their motto, 'For Christ and the Church.' I don't think we shall turn the management of affairs over to you for some time yet."

There was silence in the room. The minister cheerfully turned up the wick of his student lamp and looked at his visitor fearlessly. His heart was still singing the anthem of that glorious prayer meeting.

"I suppose the tenor was out in the vestibule to take the soprano home?" at last the Devil sneered, as if there was still a lingering hope in his mind that the soprano might be influenced in some other way.

"Why, I didn't see him," the minister spoke with a smile. "It seems to me that Andrew Stewart was very near the door when Miss Brooks went out, and unless I am very much mistaken they went away together."

Again there was silence in the study and the minister began to turn around to his desk.

"It won't last," said the Devil in a low voice.

"What won't last?" asked the minister sharply.

"Your beautiful prayer meeting. Your young folks will grow tired of it after a while when the present little emotion has died out, and—"

"What business have you here in my study?" suddenly asked the minister, rising to his feet. "What right have you to be sitting on my table?"

The Devil hastily got down off the table and the minister took a step towards him. The Devil retreated towards the door.

But the minister did not go any farther. He smiled as if satisfied with his visitor's lack of courage, and going back to his desk began to read aloud the passages he had chosen for his scripture reading on the coming Sunday:

"Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice."

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope, that it waver not; for He is faithful that promised. And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another."

"And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly."

"Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou mindest not the things that be of God, but those things that be of men."

The minister thought it was very quiet as he finished reading. He had not heard any one go out. But as he turned to look, he could see no sign of his visitor. He had gone away, leaving the minister in great peace and joy. As he turned down his lamp and lowered his head in a moment of thankful prayer, the words in the gospel filled his mind with heavenly refreshment, as they were spoken of our beloved Lord:

"Then the Devil leaveth Him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto Him."

. . . . . .

That same evening the soprano went up to her room singing lightly, " 'I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. I was glad when they said unto me—' "

She bowed her heart in thanksgiving and knew that the crisis of her temptation was passed and the pledge of her Christian life would henceforth be kept for the Master.

. . . . . .

When the president of the society came in that evening, the mother was still awake. He went into her room to kiss her good night, and told her a little about the meeting.

"The Lord bless thee, laddie," she said simply.

"He has blessed me, Mother. I feel a new

strength and joy. The church means more than ever to a good many of us. Please God, we shall be true to our motto."

And as he went out after kissing the dear face, he whispered to himself: "'For Christ and the Church.' Amen."

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